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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

AMCITS: Newsletter of the U.S. Embassy, Ottawa

A Message from Ambassador Wilkins



Greetings! I hope this finds you enjoying a happy and healthy summer season.

Unfortunately, I had hoped to keep this a light and upbeat letter, but world events dictate urgency in issuing a very timely reminder to all Americans living abroad of the importance to register with us at www.travel.state.gov. The events unfolding right now in Israel and Lebanon and government efforts to reach and evacuate citizens points to the need for this critical registration.

Americans living abroad can register with us either long and even short term. So, for example, if you are based here in Canada and want to take a Caribbean vacation, you can register with us short term. Then, while you are on holiday, the nearest American embassy will know your whereabouts and be able to provide you vital – and potentially lifesaving information – in the event of a hurricane or other natural disaster, political crisis

or any other potential disaster that might disrupt your travels.

Registering with us is quick, easy and confidential. Most importantly, when it matters most – when the unexpected occurs – a natural disaster, a terrorist attack, you have the confidence of knowing you will receive the information you need when you need it.

If you haven't already done so, I hope recent world events will provide the impetus you need to get registered with us. Also in this newsletter, you will find information regarding the upcoming hurricane season and updates on Avian flu and information on voting in U.S. elections.

All of us here at the U.S. Mission in Canada remain committed to keeping American citizens living and working here as informed and safe as possible.

As always, thanks for checking in with us and do let us know how we can serve you better.

Until Next Time,

Ambassador David H. Wilkins



CONJUNCTION, bronze sculpture by Joel Shapiro

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Public Announcement

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman

This information is current as of today, Fri Jul 21 15:27:32 2006.

Middle East and North Africa

June 14, 2006

This Public Announcement is being updated to alert Americans to ongoing security concerns in the region in light of recent events, including the death of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the deaths of three detainees at the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo, and the clashes between Palestinians and Israelis in Gaza, the West Bank and Israel. U.S. citizens are reminded to maintain a high level of vigilance and to take appropriate steps to increase their security awareness. This Public Announcement supersedes the Public Announcement issued on December 15, 2005 and expires on December 14, 2006.

Credible information has indicated terrorist groups seek to continue attacks against U.S. interests in the Middle East and North Africa. Terrorist actions may include bombings, hijackings, hostage taking, kidnappings and assassinations. While conventional weapons such as explosive devices are a more immediate threat in many areas, use of non-conventional weapons, including chemical or biological agents must be considered a possible threat. Terrorists do not distinguish between official and civilian targets. Increased security at official U.S. facilities has led terrorists and their sympathizers to seek softer targets such as public transportation, residential areas, and public areas where people congregate including restaurants, hotels, clubs, and shopping areas. The November 2005 bombings against three Western hotel chains in Jordan and the April 2006 bombing in the resort town of Dahab, Egypt underscore the intent of terrorist entities to target facilities perceived to cater to Westerners. Potential targets are not limited to those companies or establishments with overt U.S. ties. For instance, terrorists may target movie theaters, liquor stores, bars, casinos or any similar type establishment, regardless of whether they are owned and operated by host country nationals. Due to varying degrees of security at all such locations, Americans should be particularly vigilant when visiting these establishments.

The death of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the deaths of three detainees at the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo, and the clashes between Palestinians and Israelis have the potential to produce demonstrations and unrest throughout the region. In addition, the Department of State continues to warn of the possibility for violent actions against U.S. citizens and interests in the region. Uncertainty associated with the change in the Palestinian Authority government in the West Bank and Gaza may lead to increased levels of instability in the region. Anti-American violence could include possible terrorist actions against aviation, ground transportation and maritime interests, specifically in the Middle East, including the Red Sea, Persian Gulf, the Arabian Peninsula and North Africa.

The Department is concerned that extremists may be planning to carry out attacks against Westerners and oil workers on the Arabian Peninsula. Armed attacks targeting foreign nationals in Saudi Arabia that resulted in many deaths and injuries, including U.S. citizens, appear to have been preceded by extensive surveillance. Tourist destinations in Egypt that are frequented by Westerners recently have been attacked resulting in many deaths and injuries, including Americans. Extremists may be surveilling Westerners, particularly at hotels, housing areas and rental car facilities. Potential targets may include U.S. contractors, particularly those related to military interests.

Americans considering seaborne travel near the Horn of Africa or in the southern Red Sea should exercise extreme caution, as there have been several incidents of armed attacks and robberies at sea by pirates in the last year. Military action by U.S. and allied navies in several subsequent incidents resulted in the capture or death of pirates threatening international commerce. No U.S. citizens have been hurt in these attacks. When transiting around the Horn of Africa or in the Red Sea near Yemen, it is strongly recommended that vessels travel in convoys, and maintain good communications contact at all times. For more information on piracy off the Horn of Africa, please see the East Africa Public Announcement at http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/pa/pa_1158.html.

On occasion, the travel of official personnel at embassies and consulates around the world is restricted because of security concerns, and these posts may recommend that private U.S. citizens avoid the same areas if at all possible. Services to U.S. citizens in countries abroad may be affected if employees' movements are restricted. If this happens, U.S. embassies and consulates will make every effort to provide emergency services to U.S. citizens. In case office hours are reduced, U.S. citizens in need of emergency assistance should telephone the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate before visiting in person.

In addition, U.S. citizens planning to travel to the Middle East or North Africa should consult the Department of State's country-specific Public Announcements, Travel Warnings, Consular Information Sheets, the Worldwide Caution Public Announcement and other information, available on the Consular Affairs Internet website at <http://travel.state.gov>. Up-to-date information on security conditions can also be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 in the U.S. and for callers outside the U.S. and Canada a regular toll line at 1-202-501-4444.

Avian Flu Update

Frequently Asked Questions

FACT SHEET: AVIAN INFLUENZA A (H5N1) and PANDEMIC INFLUENZA

This fact sheet alerts Americans to the Department of State's preparedness efforts with respect to a possible influenza pandemic. The Department of State emphasizes that, in the event of a pandemic, its ability to assist Americans traveling and residing abroad may be severely limited by restrictions on local and international movement imposed for public health reasons, either by foreign governments and/or the United States. Furthermore, American citizens should take note that the Department of State cannot provide Americans traveling or living abroad with medications or supplies even in the event of a pandemic.

Background - H5N1 Avian Influenza A

Countries continue to report cases of avian influenza A(H5N1), commonly referred to as "bird flu" in their domestic and wild bird populations. In addition, countries are reporting H5N1 in other wild and domestic animal populations. A small number of confirmed cases of H5N1 among humans have been reported, some of which have resulted in death. More information is available on the World Health Organization (WHO) website, http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/country/en/. Please refer to this website for the most up to date information on the countries affected by H5N1 and the number of deaths.

The vast majority of the reported human cases have resulted from direct contact with H5N1-infected poultry. Although there is evidence to suggest very limited, human-to-human transmission in family groups involving close exposure to a critically ill member, there is no evidence that the virus can be easily or sustainably transmitted from human-to-human. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention(DHHS/CDC), the WHO, and the Department of State are nonetheless concerned about the potential for the virus to adapt or mutate into a strain that can be easily transmitted in a sustained manner among humans, a characteristic that could result in a human influenza pandemic, and are working closely with other partners to prepare for the possibility of pandemic influenza. Information on the U.S. Government's overall response and efforts is available at <http://www.pandemicflu.gov>.

Travel and Avian Influenza A

The Department of State, the DHHS/CDC and the WHO have not issued any health precautions, travel alerts or warnings for H5N1 infected areas. However, the DHHS/CDC advises travelers to H5N1 affected countries to avoid poultry farms, contact with animals in live food markets, and any surfaces that appear to be contaminated with feces or fluids from poultry or other animals, and to eat only thoroughly cooked poultry products. American citizens traveling to or living in H5N1 affected countries should consider the potential risks and keep informed of the latest medical guidance and information in order to make appropriate plans. Specific DHHS/CDC travel information relating to H5N1, including preventive measures, is available at <http://www.cdc.gov/flu/avian/index.htm> and <http://www.cdc.gov/travel>. WHO guidance related to avian influenza is available at http://www.who.int/csr/disease/avian_influenza/en/.

Additional general country information can be obtained from the Department of State's Consular Information Sheets at <http://travel.state.gov> and embassy and consulate websites at http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/tips/embassies/embassies_1214.html. You may also call the Department of State's toll-free number, 1-888-407 4747, or if calling from overseas, 202-501-4444.

Prevention, Response and Treatment - Take Charge of Your Plans

A vaccine for humans that is effective in preventing infection with the avian influenza A (H5N1) virus is not yet available. Based upon limited data, the DHHS/CDC has suggested that the anti-viral medication Oseltamivir (brand name- Tamiflu) may be effective in treating avian influenza A. U.S. embassies and consulates do not have supplies of this drug for use by private American citizens abroad. The Department of State has pre-positioned supplies of the drug Tamiflu at its embassies and consulates worldwide, for eligible U.S. Government employees and their families serving abroad. Americans should also be aware of the potential health risk posed by counterfeit drugs, including those represented as Tamiflu, by scam artists who sell products on the internet or in countries with lax regulations governing the production and distribution of pharmaceuticals. For more information on counterfeit drugs please visit the Food and Drug Administrations (FDA) questions and answers for counterfeit drugs at <http://www.fda.gov/oc/initiatives/counterfeit/qa.html>

In addition, the Department of State has asked its embassies and consulates to consider preparedness measures that take into consideration the fact that travel into or out of a country may not be possible, safe, or medically advisable during a pandemic. Guidance on how private citizens can prepare to shelter in place, including stocking food, water, and medical supplies, is available at the www.pandemicflu.gov website. Embassy stocks cannot be made available to private American citizens abroad and we en-

Avian Flu Update—2

courage people living in an area with outbreaks of H5N1 to prepare appropriately.

It is also likely that governments will respond to a pandemic by imposing public health measures that restrict domestic and international movement, further limiting the U.S. government's ability to assist Americans in these countries. These measures can be implemented very quickly. Areas of known H5N1 outbreaks in poultry have been quarantined by governments within 24 hours, restricting (if not preventing) movement into and out of the affected area.

Americans who are planning travel to a country that has reported the virus or who are concerned about avian influenza are advised to monitor the DHHS/CDC and the WHO websites for the latest information.

CDC Contact Information

Public Inquiries:

English (888) 246-2675

Spanish (888) 246-2857

TTY (866) 874-2646

Mon-Fri 8am-11pm EST

Sat-Sun 10am-8pm EST

Address:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

1600 Clifton Rd.

Atlanta, GA 30333

USA (404) 639-3311

Traveler's Website

<http://www.cdc.gov/travel>

WHO Liaison Office in Washington, DC

Contact Information:

Telephone: (202) 974-3787

Facsimile: (202) 974-3789

Address:

WHO Liaison Office

1889 F Street, N.W., Suite 369

Washington, D.C. 20006 USA

DON'T FORGET TO VOTE!

Just a reminder, the Federal Voting Assistance Program website at www.fvap.gov is a tremendous resource.

You can find information on how to register, request absentee ballots, election dates, etc. If you plan to vote this November in the congressional elections, now is the time to register.



Hurricane Season Checklist

Traveler's Checklist:

- Prior to leaving the United States or Canada, register your travel plans on the State Department's [travel registration website](#) or at the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.
- Check with your tour operator, charter flight company, or airline (as appropriate) regarding travel services back to the U.S. in the event of a hurricane, and the possibility of early return if a storm is forecasted for your region.
- Consider obtaining travel insurance to cover unexpected expenses in the event of an emergency.
- Research the region where you'll be visiting and be familiar with local medical facilities, public transportation, travel agents, and other emergency resources.
- Pack a first-aid kit and water treatment purification tablets.
- Keep extra bottled water and non-perishable food items on hand.
- Keep an up-to-date list of local emergency phone numbers, as well as contact numbers for the nearest U.S. Embassy or Consulate.
- Protect your vital travel documents from potential water damage.
- Pack a portable, hand crank or battery-powered weather radio and flashlight with fresh batteries.
- Obtain a cell phone that works internationally to stay in contact with family and friends in the U.S.
- Leave a detailed itinerary and your local contact information with a friend or family member in the U.S.



This newsletter is intended to keep American citizens residing in Canada informed of developments that may affect their travel plans, safety and access to Consular services. Please share with a friend.

Feedback or Comments? Your comments and opinions are appreciated and welcome. Please send them to Consular Officer Antone C. Greubel at GreubelAC@State.Gov. Thank you.